
THE WORD OF THE GUEST EDITOR

The arrival of Evangelicals (Protestants) in Latin American politics is a new phenomenon that has to be interpreted in the light not only of the present but also of the past. Religion intertwined with politics in what we know now as Latin America has been a constant since the arrival of the Spaniards in the Caribbean region. It did not change much, in that sense, the ancient perception of the pre-Hispanic kingdoms settled there, because they all had rulers who were at the same time the absolute terrestrial commanders and the supreme religious guides if not perceived as divinities themselves. Therefore, the advent of Christianity, imposed by force and later by tradition did not change the basic parameters of the relation between religion and politics in the Colonial period that lasted approximately three centuries, from the XVI to the XVIII centuries; the conquerors based their dominion on religious grounds (the Christianization of the population of the new discovered territories) and the new rulers imposed (as before) their power because of their divine rights. The independence of these colonies did not change the basic assumption that the temporal power should be supported by and support the religious institutions. The medieval institution of the Royal Patronage,¹ supported by the Iberian rulers, became the source of a "jurisdictionalism" that meant control of religious institutions by the government for political purposes. As a consequence, even with the arrival of liberal principles and governments in the XIXth Century, and in some cases separation of Church and State, the idea of the necessity and utility of religion remained in the Latin American political culture. It is as such that in most of the past century Latin American governments established a so-called "moral concordats", a form of pact or alliance between a Catholic nationalism and populist (sometimes military) regimes.²

Latin America very rarely developed democratic regimes. But in the last two decades of 20th Century and the beginning of the new millennium, the surge of a more real and significant religious plurality, a greater conscience of the necessity to protect human rights and therefore the rights of minorities in a social environment on increasingly recognition of diversity, and the gradual but real de-

1 The Patronage conceded by the Holy See through different "bulls" (decrees) in the end of XV and beginning of XVI Century have given the Spanish Catholic Kings different Rights concerning the ecclesiastical administration. The bull of Alexander VI of May 4, 1493 conceded them the domain of the Indies and the exclusive privilege to Christianize Indians. Another one of November 16, 1501 granted the Kings the tithes and first ecclesiastical benefices of the Church and in July 28, 1508 Pope Julius II conceded the right to Universal Patronage over the Catholic Church in the Indies. The Kings assumed themselves as "a kind of Apostolic Vicars with authority over spiritual affairs in America". In other words, because the crown took charge of all costs for the expansion of faith, the Holy See admitted the right to establish churches, naming bishops and clergy, and obtaining some of the needed funds from the tithes for the Church. See: John Lloyd Mechem, *Church and State in Latin America; A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1934, p. 14.

2 Kenneth P. Serbin, *Secret Dialogues; Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 25.

mocratization of Latin American societies have transformed the political arena. The fall of authoritarian regimes has been accompanied by a greater awareness of human rights and has had repercussions in the increasing defense of freedom of conscience and numerous civil freedoms related to them, including religious freedom and the search of religious equality. Evangelical churches have not been strange to these phenomena and neither the different party systems of the region. In other words, religious plurality has arrived to Latin American populism, formally dominated by Catholicism. The four articles presented in this issue addressed this new reality.

In her paper, Bibiana Ortega argued that Colombia has experienced two waves of religious mobilization with implications in the political field. The first one is related to the struggle for the recognition of religious minorities by the State. According to her, "this mobilization led to the organization of political parties and participation in the electoral competition". The new political participation allowed the consolidation of religious freedom in Colombia and facilitated some agreements with the government, allowing henceforth progress regarding the issue of religious equality. A second wave of religious mobilization has taken place in the past few years. According to Ortega, this wave has developed as a counter-movement against the LGBTI community's defense movement, through the advocacy of the traditional family, the so-called "right to life" and the opposition to what has been branded as "gender ideology. This counter-movement would have allowed political evangelicals to deploy a full range of actions that ended in the creation of new political movements and parties. And in this exercise, several Christian movements, either Catholics or Pentecostals, have united in a common agenda.

Maria das Dores Campos Machado, addresses a similar subject for the case of Brazil. In her contribution she analyses the important role played by religious actors during the recent political process and demonstrates "how the political alliances established between Pentecostals and Charismatic Catholics in the National Congress has made possible a series of political initiatives aimed at dismantling the expansion of human rights and policies of the Workers Party governments". In a similar way that Ortega, Machado shows how these politico-religious groups have been growing through an anti-Communist and conservative vision of sexual morality and gender relations, presenting an enormous challenge to Brazilian democracy. In particular, the author shows how charismatic Catholic politicians have made an informal alliance with the Evangelical block in the Chamber of Deputies in order to impede the expansion of sexual and reproductive rights and imposing a conservative political agenda on the House of Representatives.

The case of Argentina is not different. Marcos Carbonelli uses the term *direct intersections* referring to the decision by religious agents to form their own party structures, and *indirect intersections* to denominate those practices through which churches exert their influence on political parties without getting involved

in the electoral arena. Concerning the latter, the Catholic Church would have a major advantage over evangelical churches, given the historical density of its presence. And according to the author, being Argentina a young democracy, and “assuming that governance is unstable and under constant threat, the political class pragmatically relies on religious power to obtain two key resources from it.”

In our own article, Mónica Veloz and myself, we present the transformations of the relations between the most dominant political party in Mexican history (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional or PRI; Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the churches (particularly the Catholic). Created in 1929 to win elections and to resolve conflicts between different political groups, another purpose was to face with unity the opposition of the Catholic hierarchy and quite a few parishioners to the Constitution of 1917 and the measures that the revolutionary governments had established to “defanatize” the Mexican people and to limit the social influence and therefore the political power of the Catholic Church. The constitutional reform of 1992 in religious matters, the emergence of a religious plurality and the defeat of the party in the 2000 presidential elections, would modify the PRI’s perspective on State-Church relations. Furthermore, the party has not recovered the liberal and secular tradition that always characterized it, becoming more conservative and vulnerable to political pressures coming from religious leaders.

In sum, the four articles here presented show clearly how democracy and recognition of an increasing religious pluralism have created a window that has allowed religions to be reintroduced in the public spheres. How this social change represents a challenge to the Lay State and the secularization of society, to Human Rights and particularly to minorities is the central question of these four contributions. But in any case, there is little doubt surrounding the renovated role of religions in the political sphere of Latin America.

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